



# Farm to School Producer's Guide

Butterfly  
diner

# Introduction

## **What is the Farm to School Program?**

In the early 90s, schools began incorporating local foods into school meals, planting school gardens and teaching their students about where food comes from.

With the help of the USDA, these activities took root all across the country.

Today, North Dakota schools actively work to incorporate the Farm to School program through providing locally grown foods to lunchrooms and by helping students develop a deeper understanding of where their food comes from and the benefits of eating fresh, local food.

## **Who is involved in making the program possible?**

Several national, state and local organizations come together to make the Farm to School program possible.

The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI) provides state representation for the program in the National Farm to School Network, and partners with the North Dakota Department of Agriculture (NDDA) to provide resources and connections to producers, while staying up to date with all federal regulations for the program.

Other organizations, like the North Dakota State University Extension Service, may work to connect producers with the the information they need to participate in the program.

# Common Questions



## **What foods can I sell to schools?**

Federal guidelines allow local farmers, gardeners and market vendors to sell fruits and vegetables, meat, eggs and honey to schools.

Home canned or baked goods are not allowed to be served in a school.

## **What foods require inspection?**

All preserved goods, meats, eggs and dairy products must be made/packaged in a licensed food establishment and prepared under the supervision of someone trained in food safety.



## **How much food do I need to grow/make to participate?**

Each school may set their own requirements for how much they would like to purchase from producers. Many schools accept small donations for their salad bar, while others would like to be assured of an adequate supply throughout the month.

Most food service directors will have different levels of staffing and menu items that will affect how much and what type of locally sourced products they are willing to use in their kitchen.



## **Can I just donate some of my product rather than committing to contract?**

If you are interested in participating on a very small scale, you may want to donate your extra or unsold products. This is allowed, but the producer will need to work this out with the school they are donating to.

The school director is recommended to keep record of all donated products including how much was donated, when it was given and when it was used to ensure traceability for food safety.

# Common Questions

## **Can a producer participate in the program only one or two months out of the year?**

In most cases, purchasing local for a few months and then sourcing the rest of the food needed to support the school meal program, through a national distributor, should be no problem.

This is an agreement that will need to be arranged between the producer and the school's food service director.

## **Do all producers need to be under contract with the school(s) they are providing food for?**

Contracts set out parameters for providing food items to schools, but are not required for the state or federal school meal program, unless the school is purchasing more than \$50,000 from a producer.

However, the NDDPI recommends all producers and schools use a formal or informal contract that states the following:

- What the school will be purchasing from the producer
- How much the school plans to purchase
- When the school plans to purchase the items
- Who provides what for storage for the food items
- Delivery expectations
- Payment information
- Details about terminating the agreement if needed

## **What happens if I experience crop failure and can't deliver?**

Communication between the school and producer is key. The sooner you can let the school know the better in any delivery delay or non-delivery situation.

It is also recommended to discuss this possibly with the school's food service director or administration before signing any contract.

# Common Questions

## **How do schools know how much to pay for my product?**

There is no price guideline for the Farm to School program. This allows each educational institution to set their own price for local food.

## **How do I get paid for my product?**

Once under contract or an agreement has been made between producer and the school, the administration will enter the producer as a vendor in the school accounting system.

The food service director will receive an invoice for the food items and must sign off that the food has arrived in usable condition. From here, the invoice will be routed to the business office where it will be coded and recorded properly before being brought to the school board for approval.

Depending on the terms of the agreement, the producer could receive payment immediately or after 30 days when the school board approves the payment.

## **Are producers required to take special food safety trainings to participate in the Farm to School program?**

All local producers are encouraged to meet the Produce Safety Rule, which is satisfied through taking the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) trainings. These trainings are offered when the North Dakota Department of Agriculture, the North Dakota State University Extension Service or a private organization brings in a federal instructor to facilitate the training. Additional information on FSMA trainings can be found at <https://www.nd.gov/ndda/psr>.

The NDDPI also recommends producers receive their Good Agricultural Practices certification. This will verify on-farm food safety for the school food service director.

The school's food service director may receive training from the Produce University available on the Institute of Child Nutrition website. Producers may want to spend time checking out how the school's food service director has been trained to better serve the school they are looking at providing food for. Visit this NDDPI's website <https://bit.ly/2YaBV1B> for more information.

# Other Options

## Education and Hands-on Learning

Producers are not limited to supplying schools with food to participate in the Farm to School program.

Many schools are looking to connect with producers to provide educational information about local foods to their classrooms.

School districts all over the country have implemented unique promotions about locally grown food in their lessons, including farmer trading cards, hosting talks with local farmers and field trips to see how food is grown and where it comes from.



# Get Started Today

## 1. Make a Plan

Figure out how you would like to get involved in the Farm to School program. If you are planning on selling, identify what you plan to sell, how often and the way you will deliver it.

## 2. Select a School

Get familiar with the schools in your community. Keep in mind the school size and location when looking for the one that suits your Farm to School goals best.

Once you have found a school you would like to contact, visit the NDDPI's website. The Child Nutrition and Food Distribution Office will have a list of contact information for all the staff in any school in the state or contact Deb Egeland, the assistant director for the Child Nutrition Programs, at 701-328-3718.

## 3. Contact the School

Next, contact the school to see if they would be interested in purchasing from you or using your educational idea for one of their classrooms. This can be done through an informal e-mail or letter, but an appointment with the school's administration or food service director may move things along quicker.

## 4. Establish a Contract

Once a school agrees to partner with you for the Farm to School program, it is recommended that you enter into some kind of contract with the administration. The school may have to create one with your help or use an existing contract they have established for Farm to School transactions. DO NOT be afraid to request for additional items or subjects to be addressed in the contract.

Please check out our Common Questions section for more information on what to include in a producer/school contract.

# Resources

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<https://www.farmtoschool.org/>

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cfs/farm-school-census>

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cfs/selling-local-food-schools>

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cfs/usda-foods>

<https://www.ndsmallfarms.com/>

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